

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

16278

75

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
RELEASE IN FULL 1998

6 January 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Khrushchev on Vietnam

In Chapter 19 of his reminiscences, Khrushchev argues that the Chinese have been and are likely to continue exercising a good deal more influence in Hanoi than do the Soviets and that this not only is inimical to Soviet interests, but is unhealthy for the Vietnamese Communist effort in Indochina. He accuses Peking of waffling in its support to the Viet Minh in the crucial days of 1954 and of failing to cooperate with Moscow in trying to hammer out a common approach to Indochina during the 1960 World Communist Conference. At the latter meeting, Khrushchev says that Ho Chi Minh urged the Soviets to yield on some points to the Chinese lest a rupture develop that would benefit no one, and least of all, Hanoi. Following the Moscow-Peking break, Khrushchev asserts, China began to lead the Vietnamese Communists "around by a halter" and used its considerable influence among the many "pro-Chinese" in the North Vietnamese Party to sour Hanoi's relations with Moscow. This hostility persisted, he laments, despite continued Soviet aid to the Vietnamese. Khrushchev advances the proposition, albeit cautiously, that Hanoi in the wake of Ho's death is likely to be under Peking's sway even more and that Moscow's relations with the Vietnamese are likely to worsen further.

Whatever the merits and authenticity of the rest of Khrushchev's memoirs, we think that his argument in this chapter is particularly self-serving and, in the main, rests on an over simplified view of the facts of life in Hanoi and on dubious inter-

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

pretations of some not-so-solid evidence. Moreover, his line has a suspiciously familiar ring to it; it is very much like the line that the Soviets long have pushed with US interlocutors about how they and the Chinese get on with Hanoi. Presumably in these cases the Soviets are trying to persuade the US to "do something" to strengthen the Soviet hand in Hanoi, but Khrushchev's statements suggest that Moscow's sensitivity to real or imagined slights from Hanoi is genuine and deep-seated.

We doubt that pro-Chinese or pro-anything tendencies weigh overwhelmingly in Hanoi. What does count is the war and, in a foreign policy context, Hanoi's perception of how Soviet or Chinese policies mesh with its own. It is true, for instance, that Hanoi edged closer to Peking and away from Moscow in the early 1960's, but mainly because Khrushchev himself turned his back on the North Vietnamese effort in the South, which was then greatly expanding and required outside assistance. The most telling example of this, of course, was his reaction to US retaliatory raids after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964. All that Khrushchev provided was propaganda support, and it was rather mild at that. Mao, on the other hand, immediately sent the North Vietnamese a squadron of MIGs. It was only after Khrushchev was ousted that Moscow became involved in a big way. Even when the Soviets were on the sidelines, however, North Vietnam was never a Chinese Communist lackey.

To support his contention that Moscow's relations with Hanoi are likely to sour even more, Khrushchev cites, among other things, Ho Chi Minh's will and "the famous speech by Le Duan" (the latter could be either Duan's funeral oration or the long treatise published last February). He makes much of the omission from Ho's will of any expression of gratitude for Soviet wartime aid to Hanoi -- assistance which he asserts has been indispensable to the Vietnamese war effort and irreplaceable from any quarter including China. In fact, these documents provide no basis for

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

conclusions on how Hanoi might lean; indeed, neither even directly addresses the issue. Ho's testament comes closest when it makes a rather explicit plea for an end to the Sino-Soviet rift; but it does so in a neutral way. It thanks no one by name for aid, only "the fraternal countries of the socialist camp, and friendly countries in the whole world."

Khrushchev obviously was impressed by Ho--as indeed most Westerners were. Even Ho, however, was allegedly viewed with suspicion when he tried to follow what we would consider a nonpartisan policy vis-a-vis the Soviets and the Chinese. Nonpartisanship in Hanoi without Ho would naturally be the object of even greater suspicion. We think, in other words, that Khrushchev's perception of North Vietnam's attitude toward Moscow was warped by a number of subjective factors: the natural "they're-either-for-us-or-against-us" outlook of a man deeply embroiled in the Sino-Soviet dispute; and perhaps also the distrust one might expect a Ukrainian peasant to have for inscrutable Orientals, whether in Hanoi or in Peking. Even more to the point, however, is the indication in his memoirs that Khrushchev could not, or would not, admit that Hanoi's antipathy toward his stewardship, was occasioned largely by his own reluctance to give the North Vietnamese strong support.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~